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BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN GREATER HARTFORD'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT.

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RECOGNIZING THEIR FINANCIAL STAKE IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY, HARTFORD BUSINESS LEADERS THROUGH THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAVE BEEN WORKING TO REMEDY THE SOCIAL ILLS ENDEMIC TO THE CENTRAL AREAS OF THE CITY. SOME OF THE PROBLEMS HAVE RESULTED FROM A GROWING EXODUS OF WHITE PERSONS FROM CITY TO SUBURBAN AREAS AND A CORRESPONDING MOVEMENT OF POORLY EDUCATED RURAL SOUTHERNERS AND PUERTO RICANS INTO THE CORE OF THE CITY. ALMOST 30,000 OF HARTFORD'S 162,000 TOTAL POPULATION ARE NEGRO, 42.5 PERCENT OF THE 26,458 PUBLIC SCHOOL POPULATION (1966) ARE NEGRO, AND 9.5 PERCENT ARE PUERTO RICAN. ALMOST 15 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL POPULATION RECEIVES WELFARE PAYMENTS. AT A CONFERENCE ON METROPOLITAN COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT IT WAS DECIDED TO ATTACK THESE PROBLEMS ON A REGIONAL BASIS. AFTER MEETING WITH CONSULTANT SPECIALISTS AND VARIOUS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY, THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN 1966 ADOPTED A COMPREHENSIVE COORDINATED PROJECT TO COUNTERACT HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, AND EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS. PART OF THE PROJECT WAS A PROGRAM TO BUS ABOUT 400 PUPILS FROM THE CITY INTO SUBURBAN SCHOOLS. EXTENSIVE EFFORTS WERE MADE AT THE TIME TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF INFLUENTIAL SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY. AFTER ONE YEAR IN OPERATION, THIS BUSING PROGRAM APPEARS TO BE SUCCESSFUL, AND PLANS ARE BEING MADE FOR ITS CONTINUATION BEYOND THE ORIGINALLY STIPULATED 2-YEAR PERIOD. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA'S CITIES, SPONSORED BY THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, WASHINGTON, D.C., NOVEMBER 16-18, 1967. (LB)

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More than a decade ago Greater Hartford's business community committed itself to the physical rehabilitation of the region's core city, then rapidly succumbing to cancerous blight, congestion and decay.

Today the region's business and professional leaders are equally committed to a comprehensive attack on the region's social ills.

Mark of an early success in the physical rehabilitation program -- which is still continuing -- is Constitution Plaza, one of the nation's eminently successful urban renewal projects.

Victories in the campaign against the region's social ills are not so immediately evident as Constitution Plaza, but they do exist. The launching of Project Concern -- the busing of 265 children from Hartford's predominantly Negro section to schools in five suburban towns -- that started in the fall of 1966 is definitely one of them.

Commitment to the physical rehabilitation of the core city sprang from the business community's realization that their heavy financial stake in the well-being of the community was endangered by deterioration in the heart of the region.

As the beauty of Constitution Plaza replaced the ugliness of one of New England's worst downtown slums, business leaders rapidly came to recognize -- if they did not already -- that reconstruction of the City demanded not only new buildings but new approaches to the social and cultural needs of its people.

They perceived that social blight at the center of the Greater Hartford region would be as much a deterrent to the future progress and prosperity of the region as physical blight.

Moreover, beyond the desire to attack the inhibiting influence of the City's social blight on their balance sheets, there were business and industrial leaders who expressed the attitude, "We should do it because it's right".

Hartford's social problems are common to many American cities today. During the 1940's the Negro population rose from about 7,500 to about 12,500, while the City's total population increased from 166,300 to 177,400. During the next decade, the Negro population doubled while the total population decreased by 15,000.

Since 1960, while the total population within the City has held steady at about 162,000 to 163,000, the Negro population has risen to over 30,000.

Meanwhile, there has been a substantial exodus of white collar workers and executives to the suburbs. Approximately 90,000 people

moved out of Hartford during the 1950-60 decade. The people who have moved into the City have included many from rural areas of the South, and from Puerto Rico -- poorly educated, unskilled and unused to urban living.

Despite the drop in the City's population between 1950 and 1960 enrollment in its public schools rose from 19,443 to 23,148; by 1966 it was 26,458.

Of this number 42.5 percent were Negro, 9.5 percent Puerto Rican, and 47.7 percent white. In the high schools, the percentages were 35.1 Negro, 4.8 Puerto Rican and 59.8 white but in the elementary schools 44.7 Negro, 10.9 Puerto Rican, and only 44.1 white!

These figures provide one profile of the changing population of the core city. Another is the increase of general family assistance welfare payments by the City, from $1,325,000 in 1951 to more than $2 million last year. Taking all types of state and local welfare assistance into account, about 15 percent of Hartford's entire population was dependent in whole or in part on welfare payments, as against 3 percent for the State as a whole.

A hard core of unemployed and under-employed men and women is known to exist, although their numbers are difficult to determine, during a period in which the Greater Hartford economy has enjoyed unprecedented growth and general prosperity.

All these factors are of concern to the business community; it recognizes that the City of Hartford is not competing with its suburbs for its future prosperity and development, nor the suburbs with

each other. It is the Greater Hartford region as a whole that is in stiff competition with other rapidly developing regions of the nation for people, business, and industry.

To examine the problems of the region and to determine what could be done to meet them on a regional basis, the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce in 1964 sponsored a conference of the region's business, professional, governmental, political, educational and ethnic leaders.

Called the Town Meeting for Tomorrow, Greater Hartford's Conference on Metropolitan Cooperation and Development attracted 565 men and women; they spent three days in concentrated study and discussion of the region's problems and challenges. Their deliberations were preceded by extensive research by a specially organized team of political and social scientists. Their reports were widely publicized in advance of the conference, and most of the delegates did their homework before the meeting. At its conclusion delegates agreed that "a major inhibiting factor in the development of the region is the complex of social and economic problems in the core city, especially among the non-white population".

The Town Meeting delegates further agreed that "these problems, specifically, are housing, education, employment, and that they are inter-connected and self-perpetuating unless they are attacked on a broad basis with all the talents and resources our region possesses".

The Town Meeting for Tomorrow helped to crystallize a regional concern for the region's problems and a determination to attack them on a regional basis.

Meanwhile, Hartford's schools were steadily becoming more and more overcrowded. Moreover, many of the school buildings were long since obsolete. Virtually everyone was agreed that something had to be done about the City's schools, but Hartford's Board of Education and the Common Council, the city's legislative body, had arrived at an impasse on exactly what should be done.

To resolve the difficulty, the business community, through the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce, urged that a competent third party be brought in to study the school situation and make recommendations for action.

As a result a team from the Harvard Graduate School of Education was retained by the Board of Education and Common Council. Their report in the summer of 1965 included several far-reaching proposals, including adoption of the "middle school" principle of organizing the schools, and a massive program of busing children from Hartford's poverty areas to classrooms in surrounding towns.

The Chamber's Education Committee, under the chairmanship of Sterling T. Tooker, President of The Travelers Insurance Company, conducted a searching examination of the Harvard report, meeting with representatives of the Harvard study team, representatives of the boards of education and school administrators of Hartford and its suburbs, and of the permanent Regional Advisory Committee, a citizen group established at the urging of the Town Meeting for Tomorrow. As a result of this activity, and as one follow-up to the Town Meeting for Tomorrow, the Chamber formally adopted in January of 1966 a coordinated program calling for prompt and effective action in the related fields of housing, employment and education.

In the education section of this program, called "Operation Go", the Chamber called for the launching, on a voluntary basis, in the fall of 1966 of a pilot busing program to involve about 400 students.

In urging the Chamber's Board of Directors to adopt the policies and projects outlined in "Operation Go", Mr. Tooker declared:

> "I have been asked to identify the problem before you today but I'm sure this is really not necessary. I am sure you are as familiar with the problem as I am. It might be classified as the problem of every urban community in the United States today. Or, it might be called a problem of social justice."
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> "This Board and this Chamber, for several years, have been expanding their horizons beyond those originally contemplated by the typical chamber of commerce. Many years ago, we committed ourselves to a broadened horizon beyond the question of simply the downtown business community and, I think, in the process you gentlemen, as well as the many members and committees which are working in this Chamber, have all made the commitment to the totality of the region ... and this was demonstrated in the Town Meeting for Tomorrow."
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> "It is clear that this Board and the business community have identified the problem as one of totality, of this region's ability to compete effectively with all similar regions in the United States. And we have committed ourselves to the total social, economic and political vigor of this community, so our problem is simply an extension of what has gone on here in the past."

Mr. Tooker further declared:

> "I think it is clear that the problems that beset us here have come about by a variety of circumstances; principally because of the mobility of our people and specifically, people moving from a rural society to an urban society for which they have been ill-equipped; in addition, by people moving out of urban areas, leaving them to decay, and further, because of technological change, divisiveness within and between local governmental officials and community leaders, as well as numerous other reasons."
>
> "I think, if you believe as I do, that the future economic well-being of this region is dependent on regional cooperation and action, then you must also believe that we must go forward toward this goal and try specific regional programs even if we make mistakes in the process."

"...If you believe that the core city's problems are indeed regional problems;

"...If you believe that how people live day in and day out is important;

"...If you believe that the decisions being made in the fields of housing, education and employment in the city and in the region within the next year may well affect the future of this region and its people for the next fifty years;

"...If you believe that technological progress and change must be accompanied by major innovations in the social area or else technological progress and change will be largely unproductive;

"...If you believe that the business community cannot be shown to be weak in one area, such as housing or education or in employment opportunities, without being assumed to be weak elsewhere;

"...If you believe that business community leadership in housing, education and employment is inescapable, is indivisible and is without practical substitute -- then I suggest you have only one course of action -- to move for the adoption of this report and to do so NOW! "

Of the educational recommendations, including the busing proposal, Mr. Tooker said:

"We are businessmen -- not professional educators. We are not competent to determine what is the best educational system but ...

"...we can say that Hartford can afford and demands nothing less than excellence;

"...we can say education should be decently housed;

"...we can say that community colleges should be regional;

"...we can say that segregated education is inadequate preparation for citizenship;

"...we can say that the region has a responsibility to the people of the core city and vice versa..."

The Chamber Board of Directors voted unanimously to adopt "Operation Go".

William J. Sanders, Connecticut's Commissioner of Education, believed that a program of busing significant numbers of city children to suburban schools could be sold to the Greater Hartford community. He developed specific proposals for such a program, to be supported by State and Federal funds, and with members of his staff began work with representatives of the Hartford and suburban town educational systems to put the program into effect.

On recommendation of the Chamber's Education Committee the Board of Directors unanimously reiterated its support of the busing program. Chamber officers and committee members appeared at public hearings in their home towns to endorse the proposal, both on behalf of the Chamber and as voting residents of their towns. The Chamber's support for the program was expressed in official letters to the members of the boards of education and town officials.

Over the signature of Howard A. Moreen, Senior Vice President and Secretary, Aetna Life & Casualty, then chairman of the Chamber, and with a copy of "Operation Go" enclosed, the letter called particular attention to the community leadership represented in the listed roster of committees which had developed the Chamber's policies and recommendations.

It declared:

> "In the course of our committees' discussions...most, if not all, of the legitimate questions about the possible effects -- on the school systems, on both city and suburban students and their parents -- were raised and thoughtfully considered."

"It was recognized that busing students from the city to the suburbs would obviously not be a panacea for the extremely complex problems which the City of Hartford and the suburban municipalities of the Greater Hartford region face in common as an economic and social entity."

"In recognition of this, the City of Hartford, for its own part, is now embarked on one of the largest and most comprehensive school building programs, tied in with a major curriculum revision and efforts toward racial integration within the city, that any comparable American city has ever undertaken. Moreover, the housing and employment opportunities aspects of the problem are being attacked wholeheartedly by the leaders of the community. Our educational systems obviously cannot solve the problems alone."

"Nevertheless, an experimental busing program was sincerely advanced as one of several steps that are immediately possible as part of a concerted campaign to help solve one of the most critical problems that hinders the forward progress not merely of one segment of Greater Hartford's population but of all the people of the entire region."

"Until the State Department of Education came forward with its experimental busing offer to be cooperatively financed by federal, state and City of Hartford funds, there was no specific program for the suburban towns and the City of Hartford to try out. Now there is, and we earnestly hope that you and the citizens of your community will give it your favorable consideration."

"We strongly believe that the experimental program deserves nothing less than a fair and carefully evaluated trial..."

"If a substantial number of towns in the Greater Hartford region which have room for a few children should offer to participate in launching the experiment this fall, we think it would be additional evidence that the vast majority of the people of Greater Hartford do recognize the broader aspects of their regional citizenship and are thoroughly imbued with the faith, courage and willingness to act promptly and decisively that is so urgently needed."

Members of the Chamber's Board of Directors were furnished with copies of the letter, together with a list of members of the boards of education of the suburban towns, indicating their places of employment or occupation, with the suggestion that the Chamber directors might wish to add a personal note to any of these local officials they happened to know.

Needless to say, the Chamber position was well and thoroughly publicized in all news media.

In addition to this type of public action, Chamber members, both volunteer and staff members, also held frank discussions of the pros and cons of the busing proposal in informal, person-to-person sessions with key officials and board of education members in the several suburban towns. They also worked with ad hoc citizen committees that sprang up in several of the towns to support the program.

Every effort was made to line up support for the program from both major political parties and from every influential segment of the communities and to prevent its being turned into a partisan political issue.

The Chamber's action helped contribute toward the climate of acceptance that enabled the busing of the school children from Hartford's poverty areas to five suburban towns -- West Hartford, Farmington, Simsbury, Manchester and South Windsor -- to get underway last fall so smoothly that few residents of the region realized that a major revolution had been quietly accomplished.

During the 1967 session of the Connecticut's state legislature last spring, the Chamber strongly backed legislation which gave the program explicit statutory authority. Its support of this legislation was expressed in appearances at public hearings and in work with the State's political and legislative leaders.

Today Project Concern is one-year old. One town, Farmington, asked for and is getting 25 additional students. They have been enrolled in a new school that opened this fall, not so much for any

altruistic purpose of helping the City of Hartford in the solution of its problems but in order that Farmington might help educate its own students in the realities of the world in which they live. The Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford this fall opened its parochial schools in suburban towns to 50 students from Hartford poverty areas and provided them with tuition scholarships "as a manifestation of the Church's sense of responsibility".

Proposals are being formulated for the continuation and expansion of Project Concern beyond the two year experimental period for which it was instituted, because the record of the first year's operation has given strong indications that the experiment has been a success.

The region's business community, through the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce, is certain to support and actively work for this continuation and expansion, both within the five towns currently cooperating in the program and in other towns of the region. This is a significant mark of the entire region's commitment to the welfare of all its citizens.